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AUTHOR Mookherjee, Harsha N.
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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a comparative investigation identifying salient sociological variables associated with the perception of well-being by the U.S. metropolitan and nonmetropolitan populations. Subjective well-being in general and life satisfaction in particular were examined. Data used in this study were derived from the 1978 and 1988 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. Sex, age, race, marital status, educational attainment, financial status, and the location of residence are considered as independent variables, and a composite score of subjective well-being is treated as the dependent variable. The perception of well-being was constructed on a cumulative score computed from responses to attitudinal questions in the General Social Survey regarding how happy the respondent was in general, and satisfaction with: (1) the place of residence; (2) non-working activities; (3) family life; (4) friendship; (5) health and physical condition; and (6) financial situation. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify unique effects of each independent variable on the well-being score. Three independent variables had statistically significant regression coefficients: financial status (.265); marital status (.162); and education (.109). On the basis of the results presented in this study, financial status, marital status, and education are the most important factors in the perception of well-being, with race, age, and gender following. No conclusive evidence addresses whether or not metropolitan or nonmetropolitan living has any significant effect on perception of well-being. The paper contains 67 references. (ALL)

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Comparison of Perception of Well-Being Among Metro and Non-Metro Population In The United States*

Harsha N. Mookherjee
Department of Sociology
Tennessee Technological University
Cookeville, Tennessee 38505 U. S. A.

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Abstract

The general assumption leads to believe that the stress of urban living is responsible for higher rates of mental disorder in comparison to living in rural areas. This belief encourages the research investigations toward the relationship between location of residence and mental disorder. As the trends may be indicative toward more prevalence of schizophrenia, anxiety and personality disorder in the metropolitan population, manic depressive disorders are common among non-metro population. Although overcrowding has been related to mental disorder irrespective of the location of residence.

The present study develops a comparative investigation to locate some salient sociological variables associated with the general public's perception of well-being with various aspects of their lives in the metro and non-metro living in the United states. Data used in this study are collected from the national probability sample of the General Social Survey of 1978 and 1988 of the National Opinion Research Center. Some demographic variables like sex, age, race, marital status, education, financial status, and the location of residence are considered as independent variables, and composite as independent variables, and a composite score of subjective well-being is treated as the dependent variable. With the results of regression analyses a discussion is developed on the differences of perception of well-being and its predictors.

Comparison of Perception of Well-Being Among Metro and Non-Metro Population In The United States

INTRODUCTION

The concept of social well-being has been explained in the literature primarily from three dimensions of changes in the society, e.g., economic-technical growth dimension, human-interpersonal growth dimension, and environmental-quality protection dimension. The economic-technical dimension is focused on productivity, efficiency, employment, and income which are considered as basic sustenance requirements of social life. Interpersonal dimension emphasizing generating social mechanisms for maximizing human welfare, while the environmental-quality protection dimension refers to the maintenance of the natural ecological balance and the integrity of the biosphere in maximizing economic-technical and interpersonal changes. Empirically, Mukherjee (1989) argued that social well-being should be analyzed from four "cardinal valuation for mankind," consisting of "(i) survival of the species, (ii) security in the life span of humans, (iii) material prosperity for well-being, and (iv) mental progress to unfold the potentials of all individuals belonging to the species" (p. 60).

However, recent studies suggest that objective life conditions have considerable influence on a sense of well-being (Andrews and Withey 1976; Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976; Campbell 1981; Diener 1984; Veenhoven 1984; Argyle 1987). "Sense of well-being is an attribute of human experience that derives from people's perceptions of their contemporary situation" (Campbell 1981, p. 23). A sense of well-being, then, can be argued as directly related to its significance for the understanding of human nature. From the psychological perceptive, a sense of well-being is a major motivational force behind all human endeavors. In other words, the general sense of well-being may

be produced through personal satisfaction with specific domains of life experience of an individual to more global feelings of satisfaction with life.

In psychiatric terms, an individual's sense of well-being is considered very important, with the clinical definition of depression being the almost total absence of feelings of satisfaction or happiness with life and self. However, low sense of well-being defined in the form of depression or from pathological point of view consists of a wide-spread behavioral effects.

While psychiatric and psychoanalytical theories ascribe much importance to the individual's perception of well-being, a major study on subjective well-being among the general American population showed that such feelings varied considerably (cf. Gurin, Veroff, and Feld 1960). Later on, a series of large scale surveys focus on issues of perception of well-being and positive mental health as an outgrowth of developments in social indicators research (Andrews and McKennel 1980; Andrews and Withey 1976; Bharadwaj and Wilkening 1980; Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976; Szalai and Andrews 1980; Young Maccannell 1979; and others). While early attempts to monitor the status of the nation have focused mostly on objective indicators, the recognition has been growing rapidly and found equally critical to monitor the subjective aspects of well-being.

In 1965 and 1969, Bradburn and Caplovitz conducted studies focusing on positive mental health. The series of General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center since 1972 have included questions on subjective well-being. Campbell and his associates (1976) designed and used a set of questions probing psychological aspect of well-being in two national surveys in 1971 and 1978. Later, Andrews and Withey (1976) developed a comprehensive set of questions on life satisfaction and carefully analyzed their properties. All of these studies clearly demonstrated that subjective well-being tends to be related to many social, psychological, and behavioral factors.

Researches on subjective well-being reveal a general consensus regarding a positive relationship between various aspects of population's life span patterns, other associated factors and sense of well being, such as gender (Haring Stock and Okun 1984; Rubin 1979); race (Campbell 1981; Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976); age (Rodgers and Bachman 1988; Herzog, Rodgers and Woodworth 1982); George 1978; Edwards and Klemmack 1973; Palmore and Luikart 1972; Maddox and Eisdorfer 1962); income (Herzog, Rodgers and Woodworth 1982; social class/ socioeconomic status (Haring, Stock and Okun 1984; Larson 1978); education (Glenn and Weaver 1981); marital status (Gove, Hughes and Style 1983); rural/urban residence (Liang and Warfel 1983); as well as personality traits (Emmons and Diener 1985; Drumgoole 1981; Heady and Wearing 1981; Anderson 1977; Baker 1977; Wilson 1967); parental status (McLanahan and Adams 1989; Cleary and Mechanic 1983; Kessler and McRae 1981; 1982); and religiosity (Ellison, Gay and Glass 1989; Petersen and Roy 1985; Hadaway and Roof 1978). In addition, a considerable body of research has demonstrated that stressful life events such as ill-health, divorce, or loss of job may exert substantial impact on the subjective assessments and the sense of well-being of an individual (cf. Smith 1985).

Epidemiological surveys and studies of psychological distress clearly indicate a link between stress and sense of well-being (cf. McLanahan and Adams 1989; Cohen and Wills 1985; Alwin, Converse and Martin 1984; Reskin and Coverman 1980; Guttentag, Salasin and Belle 1980). Studies also reveal that among other factors, stressful social environment alone can create unhappiness, anxiety and mental disorder. The general assumption leads to believe that the stress of urban living is responsible for higher rates of mental disorder in comparison to rural areas. This belief encourages the research investigations toward the relationship between location of residence and mental disorder. Research findings become indicative toward more prevalence of schizophrenia, anxiety and

personality disorder in the metropolitan population, manic depressive disorders are common among non-metropolitan population (cf. Cockerham 1989; Fischer 1976; Eaton 1974; Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend 1974). Recent studies on suicide (Kowalski, Fanpel and Starr 1987; Bankston, Allen, and Cunningham 1983; Stark, Doyle and Rushing 1983); homicide (Bailey 1984; Wilkinson 1984; Williams 1984; Messner 1983; Blau and Blau 1982); and "social disruption hypothesis' (Brown, Geertsen and Krannich 1989; Wilkinson 1984) reveal the importance of population size, industrialization, and social integration in relation to psychological dislocations and community dissatisfaction.

The research reported in this study was undertaken to provide a comparative investigation to locate some salient sociological variables associated with the general public's perception of well-being with various aspects of their lives in the metropolitan and non-metropolitan living in the United States. In this analysis we focus on subjective well-being in general and on life satisfaction in particular. This interest developed from a number of phenomena that occurred in the United States during the past decade. Some researchers believe that the 1970s was a decade of rapid change in life styles in the United States (cf. Kitagawa 1981; Lunde 1981, Glick and Norton 1980; and others). During the past decade a slowdown in metropolitan growth, and population gains in non-metropolitan areas of the county and continued to the next decade (in the 1980s). These changes in population growth, composition and living arrangements have spawned an interest among government officials and researchers as well in the quality of life in America. Although few studies of subjective well-being focus a rural-urban comparison, we content that rural-urban comparison would provide a significant framework and perspective for the analysis of the indicators of well-being. The sudden and continuing influx of population transfer from urban to rural, coupled with excessive and improper use of land and water resulting from

rapid development and inadequate planning and growth management would have a significant impact on the perception of well-being.

METHODS

Data used in this study were from the 1978 and 1988 General Social Surveys conducted by the national Opinion Research Center (NORC). These data were selected because they contained most of the information relevant to the goals of this research. The analysis presented in this paper was based on the information collected from 2529 adult individuals, aged between 18 and 89, which were pooled together from the 1978 and 1988 surveys. As these two surveys were independently conducted and an earlier study (Mookherjee 1989) indicated no differences in the perception of well-being among these sampled populations, these are pooled together for the present analysis.

Measurement of Variables

Gender, race, age marital status, education, financial status, residence at the age of 16, and present place of residence were considered as independent variables. Gender, race, and marital status were used as dummy variables. Females, white, and married were scored one. Age was operationalized as number of years old at the time of survey. Education was measured as number of years of school completed.

Instead of using the family's annual dollar income, we used the respondent's comparative financial standing in his/her community in general as he/she perceived at the time of survey. We believe, this measurement may not give the objective evaluation of respondent's financial status, but it will be highly significant in portraying the perception of his/her financial status. We, therefore, coded the response to the question; "Compared with American families in general, would you say your family income is far below average, below average, average, above average, or far above average?" The responses were divided into

three categories: (1) below average, (2) average, and (3) above average.

The influence of the place of residence on the respondent's perception of well-being was analyzed from two characteristics, eg., (1) the present place of residence (Metro/Non-Metro) and (2) respondent's residence at the age of 16 (Rural/Urban). We assumed that one's residence during his/her growing age might have some significant effect on the choice and selection of present residence and neighborhood, which may reflect on his/her community satisfaction. This variable was used as a dummy variable, coding rural as one.

Respondent's present place of residence (Metro/Non-Metro) was coded from NORC"S size of place. Central cities with a population of 50,000 and above, and the suburbs of the central cities were operationalized as metropolitan areas, while the unincorporated areas within the SMSA and the areas outside the SMSA's were considered non-metropolitan areas. The place of residence was also used as a dummy variable in this analysis by coding metropolitan areas as one.

The dependent variable, perception of well-being is measured following three methodological premises. First, we like to emphasize on measures that reflect cognitive or evaluative dimensions of well-being which are more sociologically interesting and meaningful; and hence life satisfaction is considered as "a cognitive assessment of an underlying state thought to be relatively consistent and influenced by social factors" (Ellison, Gay and Glass 1989: 107; George 1981). Second, following Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976), we argue that a combination of domain-specific indicators of life satisfaction is a better global measure of subjective well-being. Earlier studies have confirmed that a combined measure of life satisfaction with "family life, financial status, leisure activities, friendship, health, and community is the best predictor of subjective well-being (cf. Ellison, Gay and Glass 1989; George 1981; Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976; and others). In addition, there is evidence that

feelings of happiness would contribution significantly to an overall measure of life satisfaction. Third, we contend that a simple summative index comprised of the above seven most important dimensions of social life would be as good a measure of life satisfaction as any other complex scale.

The perception of well-being, therefore, was constructed on a cumulative score computed from the informant's responses to seven attitudinal questions in the General Social Survey: (a) How happy the respondent was in general, and how satisfied he/she was regarding- (b) the place of residence, (c) non-working activities, (d) family life, (e) friendship, (f) health and physical condition, and (g) financial situation. Each of the response were divided into three categories: (1) not satisfied at all, (2) more or less satisfied, and (3) pretty well satisfied. Thus, the theoretical range of life satisfaction scores was from 7 (lowest satisfaction) to 21 (highest satisfaction). The mean scores was 17.97 with a standard deviation of 2.26.

Statistical Procedures

Zero-order correlations (r) were used to evaluate the gross relationship between the variables. After a stepwise multiple regression analysis both standardized and unstandardized partial regression coefficients were presented for an assessment of the predictive utility of each independent variable when the effect of the remaining independent variables were controlled. The discussion of the results of the regression analysis centered around the standardized partial regression coefficients.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of scores on the perception of well-being (life satisfaction scale). The results of one-way analysis of variance indicate that race, marital status, education and financial status are highly significant variables in influencing the individual's

perception of well-being. These findings agree with those of earlier studies (cf. Mookherjee 1988; Herzog et al. 1982; Glenn and Weaver 1981; Olson 1980; Campbell 1978; Larson 1978, Campbell, et al. 1976; Andrews and Withey 1976; Clemente and Sauer 1976; and others). Although age appears to be a non-significant predictor at this time, may be because of its categorical divisions, its importance has been noted in the literature (Rodgers and Bachman 1988; Herzog et al. 1982; Medley 1980; Campbell et al, 1976). Interestingly, gender, residence at age 16, and present place of residence (Metro/Non-Metro) are not found to have significant effect on subjective well-being. However, earlier studies indicated the significant effect of gender (Ellison et al. 1989; Herzog et al. 1982; Elements and Sauer 1976) and urban residence (Ellison et al. 1989; Liang and Warfel 1983) on subjective well-being.

Zero-order correlations between the life satisfaction and the independent variables are presented in Table 2. It is clearly seen from the correlation coefficients that race ($r = .144$, $p < .0001$), marital status ($r = .217$, $p < .0001$), education ($r = .165$, $p < .0001$), and financial status ($r = .326$, $p < .0001$) are significantly correlated to life satisfaction. Each of these variables individually explaining about 2.1%, 4.7%, 2.7% and 10.6% respectively of the total variation in life satisfaction. These results have strengthened our earlier findings. Although the relationship between age and life satisfaction is statistically significant ($r = .043$, $p < .01$), the association is very weak. Similar is the case between residence at age 16 and life satisfaction ($r = .034$, $p < .05$). However, the directions of the correlations are of theoretical interest, with older persons are more satisfied with life than the younger ones, an growing in rural areas may have a satisfactory attitude toward life.

The independent variables were employed in a series of stepwise multiple regression analyses, resulting in the multiple regression equation given in Table

3. The same set of independent variables were used to predict life satisfaction of the total sample. Variables earlier identified as important predictors of life satisfaction (e.g., race, marital status, education, and financial status) as well as other variables of particular interest in this study (e.g. gender, age, and residence at age 16) were retained throughout the analysis.

Considering the regression equation, we note that the present place of residence (Metro/Non-Metro) was not included in the analysis as a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Its inclusion in the regression equation did not improve the total predictability at a significant level (changes of R^2 was from .151 to .153 only). All of the other independent variables have statistically significant regression coefficients. The largest net effect on life satisfaction is that of financial status, indicating that financially well-off are more likely to express greater life satisfaction (beta=.265). Next to financial status, marital status (beta=.162) and education (beta=.109) become high predictors of life satisfaction. Following the analysis it can be said that the combined effect of these independent variables have been able to explain about 15% of the variation of life satisfaction scores. In other words, white, financially above average, older, educated, married females raised in rural areas expressed greater life satisfaction in the United States irrespective of their present place of residence.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to delineate not only how people perceived the conditions around them and evaluated those to assess their quality of life in the United States, but also to assess the influence of metropolitan living in evaluating their life satisfaction. The results indicated that there was no difference in metropolitan living or non-metropolitan living on the expression of life satisfaction in the United States, rather it might be more important

whether an individual is raised in a rural area. This finding that the influence of rural environment in early life is an important factor in the perception of life satisfaction needs further research.

On the basis of the results presented here it is possible to interpret that financial status, marital status, and education are the most important factors in the perception of well-being. Race and age are the next two important factors, while gender receives a modest support in predicting life satisfaction. As a result, we can state that life satisfaction advances with financial status, marital status, and education. Married respondent irrespective of race, age and gender seemed to be satisfied in life than those of the single persons. Race played an important role in the life satisfaction; whites scored higher on life satisfaction than blacks.

Our analysis has at least two important implications on subjective well-being studies. First, the importance of the use of multiple regression analytic model in interpreting the important effects of selected variables on life satisfaction. When we examined simple mean differences of subsamples with varying age levels, age was not an important factor in explaining the variation of life satisfaction. However, when we turned to the regression analysis, age played an important predictor of life satisfaction. This finding is not unfamiliar, some earlier researchers (Olson 1980; Campbell et al. 1976) found age to be related to subjective well-being and some research indicated no age effect (Saurer 1977; Andrews and Withey 1976).

A second implication is the importance of rural/urban or metropolitan/non-metropolitan living on life satisfaction. This research findings have not clearly explained this aspect. Although the evidence is not conclusive, many studies related overcrowding with mental disorder, we are not convinced in our study whether metropolitan/non-metropolitan living has any significant effect

on perception of well-being.

TABLE 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Scores on Life Satisfaction by Gender, Race, Age, Marital Status, Education, Financial Status, Residence at age 16, and Present Place of Residence.

Independent Variables		Mean	SD	N	F-Value	Significant
Gender	Male	17.98	2.32	1081		
	Female	17.97	2.21	1448	.015	.9039
Race	White	18.10	2.19	2195		
	Black	17.14	2.48	334	53.151	.00001
Age	18-30	17.18	2.19	720		
	31-50	18.04	2.11	895		
	51-70	18.09	2.44	632		
	71 & Above	18.01	2.43	282	2.598	.0508
Marital Status	Married	18.38	2.01	1504		
	Not-Married	17.38	2.47	1025	125.067	.00001
Education	0-11	17.51	2.52	734		
	12	17.90	2.26	871		
	13 & Above	18.42	1.94	924	34.621	.00001
Financial Status	Below Average	16.86	2.47	696		
	Average	18.19	2.03	1329		
	Above Average	18.96	1.85	504	155.803	.00001
Residence at Age 16	Rural	18.03	2.24	1589		
	Urban	17.88	2.28	940	2.865	.0907
Present Place of Residence	Metropolitan Area	17.93	2.21	1179		
	Non-Metropolitan Area	18.02	2.30	1350	0.967	.3255

TABLE 2. Zero-order Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations.

Variables	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	Mean	SD
(1) Life Satisfaction	-.002	.144[d]	.043[b]	.217[d]	.165[d]	.326[d]	.034[a]	.020	17.97	2.26
(2) Gender		-.011	.050[b]	-.101[d]	-.080[d]	-.098[d]	-.044[b]	-.016	.57	.50
(3) Race			.096[d]	.128[d]	.086[d]	.150[d]	.072[d]	.026	.87	.34
(4) Age				-.010	-.302[d]	-.025	.176[d]	-.036[a]	44.53	18.03
(5) Marital Status					.025	.174[d]	.065[c]	.013	.60	.49
(6) Education						.305[d]	-.197[d]	-.007	12.17	3.13
(7) Financial Status							-.075[d]	-.006	1.92	.68
(8) Residence at Age 16 (Rural/Urban)								.072[d]	.63	.48
(9) Present Place of Residence (Metro/Non Metro)								--	.53	.50

[a] Significant at .05 level of probability.

[b] Significant at .01 level of probability.

[c] Significant at .001 level of probability.

[d] Significant at .0001 level of probability.

TABLE 3. Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors For Independent Variables on Life Satisfaction Scores.

Variables	Partial Regression Coefficients		
	Standardized b	Unstandardized b	Standard Error
Gender	.048*	.221	.085
Race	.064**	.426	.126
Age	.068**	.009	.002
Marital Status	.162**	.746	.087
Education	.109**	.079	.015
Financial Status	.265**	.873	.065
Residence At Age 16 (Rural/Urban)	.049*	.227	.089
Present Place Of Residence (Metro/Non/Metro)	.018	.081	.083

Multiple R = .3914+ Adjusted R^2 = .151

F = 65.158 Significant at .00001 level of probability

* Significant at .01 level of probability.
** Significant at .001 level of probability.
\+ Excludes present place of residence (Metro/Non-Metro).

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